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Multilingualism and policy

How multilingual is Germany after 50 years of immigration



What role does multilingualism play in schools and other public institutions? And how is immigration and multilingualism policy shaped in Germany? These were the two featured questions asked at the international conference “50 Years Later: Immigration – Multilingualism –

Education” in Dortmund in October.

At the first plenary speech at the Dortmund conference, Konrad Ehlich, a language specialist from Berlin, illustrated how the norm in this monolingual country has developed over time and why Germany is now struggling with the actual multilingual nature of its society. Other talks and discussions focused on the question of how to make multilingualism a permanent fixture in educational institutions. For example: Why do foreign-language development programs so often fail in the transition from day care to elementary school? What roles do parents and multicultural media projects play in schools? Do students with immigrant parents have specific needs with regard to language development? And what should we pay attention to in education?

Multilingualism in day care, schools and universities

Projects such as *ProDaZ – Deutsch als Zweitsprache in allen Fächern* (lit. German as a Foreign Language (GFL) in all Subjects) at the University of Duisburg-Essen, or *Echte Väter* (lit. Real Fathers) at the RAA (regional office for helping children and youth of immigrant families) in Herne were also

introduced at the conference. The university project is hoping to integrate GFL into the course of study for educators in all fields, so that the children of immigrant families will have a better chance of successfully learning German over the long term, regardless of the subject. The RAA in Herne is trying to strengthen the role of Turkish fathers and make them more positive role models for the socialization of their children.



Migration and Integration



Migration is changing cultures. The Goethe-Institut reflects these developments in Germany and around the world and dedicates its work to the linguistic integration of migrants.

The Power of Language



The impact of language in a globalised world

Tips

- [EFNIL – European Federation of National Institutions for Language](#)
- [EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture](#)
- [Multilingualism European Commission](#)
- [Poliglotti4.eu](#)

German displaces native languages



In her speech at the conference, Bochum scientist Maria Costa addressed the question of how immigration affects the native languages of immigrants. As an example, she used Wolfsburg, the "largest Italian town north of the Alps", and the German-Italian hybrid language that has developed there, with words such as

"smeldare" for "abmelden" (log off) or "grillare" for "grillen" (barbecue). Because neither standard Italian nor the regional dialects of the parents are being spoken by the younger generation, Costa surmises that the language will disappear completely from the Lower Saxon city. Ingo Schöningh from the Goethe-Institut in Tokyo predicts a similar fate for Vietnamese as an immigrant language in Germany. According to Schöningh, the so-called "boat people" in West Germany and the "contract workers" in the former East Germany possess very poor German skills while, ironically, their children speak it with almost native proficiency. He chalks this up to their outstanding performance in school and sees them as role model immigrants in that regard. As a result, however, says one of the Vietnamese teachers Schöningh spoke with, the parents and children of such families have been known to have rather serious communication problems.

Multilingual by nature

Anja Treichel and Christiane Maree from the Verband binationaler Familien und Partnerschaften (lit. association of binational families and partnerships) presented a family in which communication between the parents and children has not always been smooth due to language barriers. The Arab-speaking parents don't understand the Arabic "dialect" their children speak because it is so heavily influenced by the structures of German. At the same time, however, Treichel and Maree make it clear from their experience in family counseling that multilingualism is self-evident in countless binational families and that there are a variety of combinations with regard to who speaks what language with whom and who is understood. "The first look at concrete cases shows that people with a multicultural or bicultural identity are often successful at becoming multilingual. They shift effortlessly between two or more languages and tend to resist the classic pigeonholing of 'German as the defining culture' or the 'ethnically structured immigrant communities'."



Dr. Ingo Schöningh is the Deputy Director and Director of Language Work at the Goethe Institut in Tokyo. At the international conference *50 Years Later: Immigration – Multilingualism – Education* he held a talk on the subject of *Was ist Mutter(s)Sprache? Zum Erwerb des Vietnamesischen von vietnamesischstämmigen Kindern in Deutschland* (lit. What is Mother('s) Tongue? Acquiring Vietnamese from Vietnamese-Speaking Children in Germany).

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